UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FORTY-SEVENTH SESSION

Official Records

FIFTH COMMITTEE
58th meeting
held on
Thursday, 25 March 1993
at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 58th MEETING

Chairman: Ms. ROTHEISER (Austria)
(Vice-Chairman)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 104: PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1992-1993 (continued)

Programme budget implications of draft resolution A/C.2/47/L.91 concerning agenda item 89 (a)

Revised estimates under section 37: Regional Centres for Peace and Disarmament

Granting of travel assistance to least developed and other developing countries that are members of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (continued)

Comprehensive study of the question of honoraria payable to members of organs and subsidiary organs of the United Nations

Conditions of service and compensation for members of the Joint Inspection Unit

This record is subject to correction.
Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, Room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

Distr. GENERAL
A/C.5/47/SR.58
10 August 1993

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

93-80347 (E)

In the absence of Mr. Dinu (Romania), Ms. Rotheiser (Austria), Vice-Chairman, took the chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 104: PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1992-1993 (continued)

Programme budget implications of draft resolution A/C.2/47/L.91 concerning agenda item 89 (a) (A/47/7/Add.14 and A/C.5/47/82)

1. The CHAIRMAN drew the Committee's attention to the statement submitted by the Secretary-General concerning the programme budget implications of draft resolution A/C.2/47/L.91 relating to the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) (A/C.5/47/82) and the related report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) (A/47/7/Add.14). According to the statement submitted by the Secretary-General, should the General Assembly adopt draft resolution A/C.2/47/L.91, an additional appropriation in the amount of $15,989,000 would be required under section 34, Special expenses, of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1992-1993 (A/C.5/47/82, para. 16). The Advisory Committee, however, was not in favour of that course of action and recommended that the Secretary-General should be given commitment authority for an additional $200,000 to cover requirements through June 1993 and that actual requirements should be reported in the context of the second performance report for 1992-1993 (A/47/7/Add.14, para. 11). In that connection, he pointed out that in section XXIV of resolution 47/219, the General Assembly had decided to authorize the Secretary-General to commit funds, not to exceed $400,000, for the period 1 January through 28 February 1993, by advances from the Working Capital Fund, to cover all costs related to the provision of security and maintenance of the premises of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, as well as the costs of maintaining the existing staff members of the New York office of the Institute for whom placement was to be sought elsewhere within the United Nations system, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 42/197 of 11 December 1987. The Advisory Committee recommended that the Fifth Committee should inform the General Assembly that, if it were to adopt the draft resolution, no additional appropriation would be required at the present time.

2. Mr. BOIN (France) said that his delegation had no problem with regard to the ACABQ recommendations. He wished to know, however, why the current market value of the UNITAR building had not been appraised and why the possibility of selling the building was not being considered.

3. Mr. FRANCIS (Australia) said that his delegation also supported the recommendations of ACABQ. He noted that paragraph 6 of the report of the Advisory Committee (A/47/7/Add.14) referred to savings in United Nations programme budgets since 1983. His delegation wished to know the nature of those savings and how they were recorded. The Secretariat should indicate whether they were an unencumbered balance and whether Member States had been consulted about them.

4. Mr. ONWUALIA (Nigeria) inquired whether the liaison officer referred to in paragraph 2 of draft resolution A/C.2/47/L.91 had been designated by the Secretary-General.

5. Mr. BAUDOT (Controller) said that, according to paragraph 6 of its report, the Advisory Committee saw no reason why the cancellation of the UNITAR debt should require an additional appropriation and recommended further that the accounting problem caused by the UNITAR budget should be covered by an appropriate explanation in the accounts, taking into consideration the current value of the UNITAR building and land. If that recommendation was adopted, the UNITAR building and land would constitute an uncollectable asset for the regular budget of the United Nations. Another possibility was to decide that the regular budget had provided de facto subsidies to the Institute during the years in question. In the absence of voluntary contributions at a sufficient level to enable the Institute to function and since the General Assembly had not taken a decision to close UNITAR, advances had been provided from the regular budget. From a purely accounting point of view, those advances could be considered subsidies necessitated by the lack of voluntary contributions to ensure the financing of UNITAR.

6. If the UNITAR building became the property of the United Nations, there would be a need to meet the maintenance costs. Accordingly, it would be helpful if the commitment authority recommended by ACABQ included the expenditure requirements for the upkeep of the building itself covering the remainder of 1993.

7. In paragraph 2 of its report, the Advisory Committee pointed out that unless the General Assembly decided otherwise, the effective date for extrabudgetary funding would be the date on which the General Assembly adopted the draft resolution. Accordingly, unless the Fifth Committee explicitly indicated otherwise, the intent of the draft resolution and the recommendation of ACABQ to the Fifth Committee was that all the expenditure requirements of the Institute, other than those related to the transitional arrangements for the New York operations of UNITAR, should be met from the beginning of 1993 through extrabudgetary resources. Unless the Fifth Committee stated otherwise, there would be no authority to advance regular budget resources to UNITAR for any purpose other than its New York operations.

8. No liaison officer had been designated. He assumed that, since there were no indications to the contrary, paragraph 2 of draft resolution A/C.2/47/L.91 would be taken literally by the Secretary-General and that existing resources would be used. The liaison functions would be exercised from within the Secretariat.

9. Ms. MILLS (Deputy Controller) said that, since the real estate market in New York City was currently very depressed, it was unlikely that the United Nations would be able to recover the amounts expended for the UNITAR building and land. Accordingly, it would not be the wisest course of action to sell the building at the present time.

10. Mr. BAUDOT (Controller) said that, if the Fifth Committee followed the recommendations of ACABQ, it would have to resume consideration of the matter in June to give further commitment authority to maintain the building in proper condition. It was the understanding of the Secretariat that the regular budget would not be used to finance activities that were not related to the New York operations of UNITAR and the phasing out of the Institute in New York.

11. The CHAIRMAN suggested that, on the basis of the programme budget implications submitted by the Secretary-General, and on the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, the Fifth Committee should inform the General Assembly that, should it adopt draft resolution A/C.2/47/L.91, a commitment authority should be given to the Secretary-General for an additional $200,000 to cover requirements through June 1993 and actual requirements should be reported in the context of the annual performance report for 1992-1993 and that no additional appropriation would be required at the present time.

12. It was so decided.

13. Mrs. CLIFF (United Kingdom) welcomed the decision which had just been taken by the Committee and said that her delegation attached particular importance to paragraph 8 of the report of the Advisory Committee (A/47/7/Add.14).

Revised estimates under section 37: Regional Centres for Peace and Disarmament (A/47/7/Add.13 and A/C.5/47/62)

14. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to the report of the Secretary-General on the revised estimates under section 37 (A/C.5/47/62) and the related report of the Advisory Committee (A/47/7/Add.13).

15. Mr. BOIN (France) said that in resolution 46/37 F the General Assembly had created a dangerous precedent in deciding that the administrative costs of the Regional Centres should be financed from the regular budget. Serious consideration should be given to the question of whether that type of financing should be maintained. The report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/47/62) focused largely on administrative activities. A specific definition of the operational activities of the centres would be appreciated. The report indicated that the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa required the services of 10 locally recruited staff, including two drivers and four watchmen/cleaners (two each for the Centre and the Director's residence). In view of the budget constraints currently facing all countries, that seemed somewhat excessive.

16. Mr. MICHALSKI (United States of America) said that he fully supported the views expressed by the representative of France and noted that in 1991 the Secretary-General had been asked to provide a detailed breakdown of the administrative costs of the Regional Centres. His delegation considered those costs excessive and hoped that the Secretary-General would continue his efforts to reduce them.

17. The Committee approved an additional appropriation in the amount of $150,000 under section 37 of the programme budget for the biennium 1992-1993, subject to the guidelines for the use and operation of the contingency fund, to provide for the administrative support of the Regional Centres for Peace and Disarmament.

Granting of travel assistance to least developed and other developing countries that are members of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (continued) (A/C.5/47/CRP.1)

18. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to the note by the Secretary-General on the granting of travel assistance to least developed and other developing countries that were members of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) (A/C.5/47/CRP.1) and suggested that a decision should be taken at a later date following informal consultations.

19. It was so decided.

Comprehensive study of the question of honoraria payable to members of organs and subsidiary organs of the United Nations (A/C.5/46/12; A/C.5/47/45; A/46/7/Add.8; and A/47/7/Add.10)

20. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to the reports by the Secretary-General on the question of honoraria payable to members of organs and subsidiary organs of the United Nations (A/C.5/46/12 and A/C.5/47/45) and the related reports of ACABQ (A/46/7/Add.8 and A/47/7/Add.10).

21. Mr. MICHALSKI (United States of America) recalled that his delegation had proposed that the honoraria should be reduced to $1 per year. It had withdrawn that proposal in view of the lack of support, but felt strongly that the current rates should not be raised.

22. Mr. RAE (India) suggested that the Committee should adopt the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on the matter.

23. Mr. CHUINKAM (Cameroon) said that his delegation would find it difficult to support an increase in the honoraria and noted that, if the Committee wished to be guided by the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, it should also consider whether there were other United Nations bodies which also merited such honoraria.

24. Mr. ZAHID (Morocco) associated himself with the Cameroonian representative's views regarding other United Nations bodies. However, the Committee should at least adopt the Advisory Committee's recommendation with regard to the cases before it.

25. Mr. DJACTA (Algeria) said that his delegation would be prepared to accept that solution.

26. Mr. FRANCIS (Australia) said that his delegation felt some concern with respect to increasing the honoraria and thought that consideration of the question should at least be deferred. It would like to know what effect approving the increases would have on other United Nations bodies and would welcome a report by the Secretary-General on that question.

27. Mr. ZAHID (Morocco) said that the question of the granting of travel assistance to members of UNCITRAL was relevant to a general decision of principle on the question of honoraria and suggested that informal consultations should be held on the two questions together.

28. Mr. INOMATA (Japan) said that his delegation saw no connection between the two questions and felt that the informal discussions on them should be kept separate. The six United Nations bodies for which honoraria were paid had been dealt with on an exceptional basis; there were other bodies which worked much harder and for much longer periods of time which received no honoraria. That disparity should be taken into account before any comprehensive decision was taken. Moreover, as the honoraria had been decided on in all six cases as an exceptional measure, his delegation saw no justification for a blanket increase of 25 per cent and would be reluctant to approve such a decision.

29. Mr. MICHALSKI (United States of America) pointed out that when the issue of UNCITRAL had been dealt with in 1992 other proposals had been made, and said that his delegation intended to put its own proposals forward again. He also suggested that if the honoraria were to be raised by 25 per cent then the additional 40 per cent in travel and subsistence allowance currently received by members of the six bodies concerned should be eliminated.

30. Mr. ALVAREZ (Uruguay) felt that the two questions relating to UNCITRAL and honoraria should be dealt with separately.

31. Mr. DUHALT (Mexico) supported the suggestion that separate informal consultations should be held.

32. Mrs. CLIFF (United Kingdom) asked whether all the representatives entitled to honoraria actually accepted them and whether the proposal contained in document A/C.5/47/CRP.1 constituted a formal proposal by the Secretary-General.

33. Mr. BAUDOT (Controller) said it was his understanding that document A/C.5/47/CRP.1 was intended as an information paper and that paragraphs 16-19 of that paper were intended only to clarify the issue. He would try to provide information on the other question asked by the United Kingdom representative at a later date.

34. The CHAIRMAN suggested that informal consultations should be held on the question before any decision was taken.

35. It was so decided.

Conditions of service and compensation for members of the Joint Inspection Unit (A/C.5/46/17 and A/C.5/45/75)

36. The CHAIRMAN suggested that, since the question of conditions of service and compensation for members of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) had been on the agenda of the Fifth Committee for the past two years, it was now time to take a final decision on it.

37. Mr. GIUFFRIDA (Italy) said he believed that the matter must be considered in conjunction with the report on the functioning of JIU and should therefore be postponed until the forty-eighth session.

38. Mr. MICHALSKI (United States of America) said that the issue was a minor one and should never have come before the Fifth Committee. He proposed that the Committee should take no further action on it.

39. Mr. BOIN (France) supported the Chairman's suggestion. The question under discussion was entirely separate from that of the functioning of JIU and should not be connected with it. Moreover, it involved an important issue, that of the degradation of the conditions of service of members of the international civil service and the devaluation of the work of JIU.

40. Mrs. LIANIDOU (Greece) supported the proposal that consideration of the question should be postponed until the forty-eighth session.

41. Mr. MICHALSKI (United States of America) said that his delegation in no way intended to devalue the work of JIU. However, it felt strongly that the proposal for an increase in the remuneration of the members of JIU was inappropriate at the present time.

42. He asked what the net salary of JIU officials was at present and what it would be if the proposed increase took effect. He would also like information regarding the views of the governing bodies of the other organizations which had been consulted on the question.

43. Mr. DUVAL (Programme Planning and Budget Division) said that the current annual remuneration for staff members at step IV of the D-2 level was $131,552. If the General Assembly approved the proposal for an increase in the remuneration of members of JIU to step VI of the D-2 level, their remuneration would rise to $136,399. Replying to the second question put by the United States representative, he said that article 14 of the Statute of the Joint Inspection Unit would have to be amended and the amendment submitted to the other organizations of the common system for approval.

44. Mr. FRANCIS (Australia) endorsed the proposal that consideration of the question should be deferred. Doubts had been expressed about the role of JIU and a review of its operations was expected to be undertaken at the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly. In the circumstances, it would be inappropriate to consider the question of increased honoraria at the current time.

45. Mr. MICHALSKI (United States of America) said that it would be useful to know whether the remuneration levels indicated by the Secretariat were net figures excluding allowances and other benefits. He would welcome from the Secretariat an estimate of the cash value of such benefits.

46. His delegation did not think that it would be worthwhile to reopen the question of amending the Statute of JIU since more formal proposals were then likely to be made, for example a proposal that the number of inspectors should be reduced.

47. Mr. GIUFFRIDA (Italy) said that his earlier proposal had been aimed at achieving a fair compromise. He nevertheless supported the current proposal for a general review of the role and Statute of JIU. That was a matter for negotiation, however, and it would be better to postpone further consideration of the matter until the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

48. Mr. DUVAL (Programme Planning and Budget Division), replying to the question asked by the representative of the United States of America, said that the figures he had indicated were, indeed, net. He was not in a position to provide an estimate of the cash value of the benefits received by members of JIU at the current meeting, but would do so later.

49. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Committee should recommend to the General Assembly that it take no action at the present time on the question of conditions of service for members of the Joint Inspection Unit and decide to review it in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1994-1995.

50. Mr. MICHALSKI (United States of America) said that the Committee should try to dispose of the item without further delay. He saw no reason why the honoraria payable to the members of JIU should be increased at the current time and the Committee should be bold enough to say so.

51. Mr. STITT (United Kingdom) expressed concern at the proposal that the question should be considered in the context of the proposed programme budget. The relationship between the regular budget and the costs of JIU, which appeared under the rubric of special expenses, was a very complex one. It would therefore be unwise to inject a question of principle into the issue of remuneration levels for inspectors of JIU. If the matter could not be resolved at the current session, then he would reluctantly agree that it should be deferred until the following session, but not in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1994-1995.

52. The CHAIRMAN suggested that, in view of the difficulty in reaching a consensus in the Committee, the matter should be discussed in informal consultations.

53. Mr. MÜNCH (Germany) endorsed the proposal put forward by the representative of Italy and supported by the representative of Greece, which provided a solid basis for consensus.

54. Mr. BAZABIDILA (Congo) said that his delegation would welcome any information on previous reviews of the honoraria payable to members of JIU. Such information could constitute a useful basis for taking a decision on the matter. He would have difficulty, however, in supporting proposals to consider increased salaries for officials when no decisions had yet been reached on other pending matters, particularly the question of travel assistance to least developed and other developing countries that were members of UNCITRAL to enable them to participate in the sessions of the Commission and its working groups.

55. Mr. DUHALT (Mexico) said that he saw no contradiction between the position of those delegations which were in favour of deferring consideration of increased honoraria for members of JIU until the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly and those which wished to hold salaries at their current level. Postponement of consideration of the question, which he supported, meant that honoraria would remain at their current levels. In view of the Committee's heavy agenda, his delegation would agree only reluctantly to informal consultations on the matter.

56. Mr. ZAHID (Morocco) questioned the wisdom of referring so many issues to informal consultations. The Committee was in fact close to a consensus and his delegation therefore supported the proposal that consideration of the matter should be deferred until the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

57. Mr. MICHALSKI (United States of America) said that he was not in favour of the matter being taken up again at the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly. He would nevertheless go along with the proposal for a general review of the matter to be carried out under the agenda item on JIU, at which time other proposals could be made, for instance a proposal for a reduction in the number of inspectors. In that connection, he would welcome information from the Secretariat on the number of reports prepared by JIU in each of the previous five years. While the Unit's productivity could not be measured in terms of the number of reports it produced, that number seemed to have declined in recent years.

58. Mr. BOIN (France) said that he was in favour of deferring consideration of the matter until the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly in the context of an overall review of the role of JIU. He did not think that informal consultations at the current stage would make the best use of the Committee's time.

59. Mr. NDOBOLI (Uganda) supported the proposal that consideration of the question should be deferred until the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly. That would be preferable to holding informal consultations on the matter at the current session, since the already crowded agenda imposed particular burdens on small delegations such as his.

60. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Fifth Committee should recommend to the General Assembly that it should postpone consideration of the question of conditions of service and compensation for members of JIU until its forty-eighth session and review it in the context of the item on the Joint Inspection Unit.

61. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.